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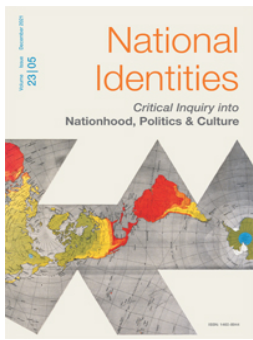
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How to win the Ryder Cup: an analysis of individual player performance and collective national performance in Team Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the geographical composition of European Ryder Cup teams in the biennial golf match against the United States of America. It looks at the different nationalities that have been a part of Team Europe and considers what combination of players is most likely to contribute to European success. It was found that Europe is most successful when more countries are represented. A European team will be more likely to win a match staged in Europe and that the best chance of doing this is when the team comprises of 8 or 9 different nationalities.

KEYWORDS

Golf; team performance; nation; place; success

1. Introduction

The Ryder Cup is the biggest team event in the sport of golf. Staged every two years, it pits a team representing the United States of America (USA) against a team representing Europe. The very existence of a supranational European team has always been something of an anomaly in international sport where national teams are usually given prominence in sports such as association football and rugby union. As a team that first competed as Great Britain, now is a particularly interesting moment to consider the success of this collective in light of the decision of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's in 2016 to leave the European Union. This withdrawal, often referred to as 'Brexit', continues to be the subject of much debate and dominated many media networks in the UK up until the global pandemic of the Coronavirus disease. The 2020 Ryder Cup was one of the many international sporting events cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2018 Ryder Cup was the last match before the UK's 'Brexit'. Discussions of what the post-Brexit landscape will look like occupies the attention of a variety of social and political scientists. Whilst the importance of a golf event may seem somewhat trivial in relation to wider social, political and economic issues, the Ryder Cup is important because it is one of the only places where the flag of Europe is

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waved and a collective European identity is celebrated in sport (Harris, 2014). This study aims to add to the literature on the geography of sport by looking at one of the factors that contribute to making a successful European team through focusing on the role of the nation and the combination of players to have represented Team Europe from 1979 to 2016.

The fact that this European golf team has been so successful has attracted the attention of many journalists who have tried to find ways of explaining just how this collective works. These players speak different languages (although most are fluent in English) and come from very different cultural backgrounds. This is positioned in opposition to what is represented as the far more homogenous make-up of Team USA. Meyer (2014) noted that:

No one can prove why the Europeans, who are subjected to the same pressure, routinely beat the U.S. in the Ryder Cup. The best explanation I've ever heard is that Europeans teams naturally break themselves into stress-modulating, pod-like groups based on nationality.

Here is one example of where observers have tried to explain just why (and how) Team Europe has been successful. Our research represents one of the first studies to look at the make-up of who actually represents Europe in this event and considers what particular collective this team really encompasses. A number of different theories have been put forward to explain the success of European golfers in the Ryder Cup when they are often competing against a USA team that usually includes more higher-ranked golfers from the official world golf rankings. Some commentators, like Meyer (2014), have suggested that this success is based on smaller national teams within a supranational collective. Whilst there is some substance in this, we were also conscious of the fact that sometimes Team Europe only included one representative from a particular country so it was clear that whilst there would be some importance attached to national pairings there would also be many other aspects to consider. In this paper, we look at the performances of players in European Ryder Cup teams from 1979 to 2016. It also looks at the different nationalities who have represented Team Europe across this period and analyses the data to provide some observations on what combination of players is most likely to contribute to a winning European team. Before looking specifically at the case of the Ryder Cup we will firstly identify where this study fits within and around the broader literature on national identities and major international sporting events.

1.1. Sporting events and national identities

There has been a considerable increase in the literature focusing on the place of major international sporting events in contemporary society (e.g. Grix, 2017; Heere & Xing, 2012; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Rojek, 2013; Smith, 2012). This work has highlighted the ways in which sport matters and can serve as an important tool in the project of nation-building and the representation of national identities. With an increased focus on the medal tables in the Olympic Games as a kind of Olympic arms race, the successes and failures of sport development systems have been the subject of numerous studies (Arnold et al., 2012; Green & Oakley, 2001; Sotiriadou & De Bosscher, 2013). Success on the sporting stage is seen to be about so much more than sport itself and is also deemed to represent the position of a nation in the new world order. Sport clearly matters as the significant amounts of money invested in elite athlete performance

programmes clearly illustrates (see De Bossher & De Rycke, 2017; De Bossher et al., 2006; Green, 2006; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Sotiriadou & De Bossher, 2013, 2018; Slack, 2014). Athletes compete for a national team, often wearing the colours of the flag of that particular country and sing the national anthem. The globalisation of sport has led to an increased movement of athletes, coaches, and sport administrators within an increasingly international sport labour market (see especially, Bairner, 2001; Bale, 1994; Bale & Maguire, 1994; Harris, 2010; Maguire, 2005; Markovits & Rensmann, 2010; Skey, 2015), which in many cases transcend, or complicate, the notion of national identity.

Sport is clearly something that is central to how national identities are created, represented and adopted. As Brookes (2002, p. 83) has noted, 'it is difficult to understate the importance of national identity to the media presentation of sport'. The sporting successes and failures of national sporting teams are often viewed as symbolic of a nation's place within the broader world order (see Bairner, 2001; Maguire, 2005; Markovits & Rensmann, 2010). National identity and national pride are established through the achievements of sports teams and individual athletes. According to Rowe et al. (1998), men are the representatives of national character and so team competitions often attract a great deal of attention with frequent references to battles and broader military discourse (see for example, Harris & Lyberger, 2008; O'Donnell, 1994; Vincent & Harris, 2014). The continual making and remaking of national identity through sport can change over time (see Bairner, 2009; Carroll & Bairner, 2019; Harris, 2011), but what can't be disputed is that sport matters.

Boyle and Haynes (2000) suggest that with its visibility and focus on symbols, winning and competition, sport serves as a key marker in indicating certain national characteristics and is often used as representative of national identity. Shobe (2008) noted the connections between sport, identity and place and explored how the nation plays a central role in contemporary society. The importance of place is arguably more visible than ever before in discussions of the nation and elite sport where the performances of athletes are scrutinised in a range of media.

Miller et al. (2001, p. 31) highlighted how 'the sporting body bears triumphant national mythologies in a double way, extending the body to encompass the nation and compressing it to obscure the social divisions that threaten national unity'. Golf is usually played as an individual sport but team events such as the Ryder Cup have become an important part of the sporting landscape. The fact that the event is so different to many other main golf competitions, and that one of the teams is comprised of a supranational collective, makes it an interesting case to explore the complexities of national identities across space and time.

Scholars have shown that sport is an important form of national representation, and that it can be a particularly powerful way of promoting a nation on an international stage (Bairner, 2009; Heere & Xing, 2012; Maguire, 2005). The body of work in this area is extensive and it is not possible to list every piece of research that has helped develop this area of the academy into a rich and vibrant area of study. Rather, we will briefly outline some examples of this scholarship to provide an indicative insight of the most important issues relating to the particular case study considered here when we consider the specific case of Europe.

Much of the literature on European sport has focused on the differences between nations (e.g. Weiss et al., 2016). This work has highlighted the different ways that sport sits within wider cultural contexts and has explored the similarities and differences of elite sport development systems (e.g. Green & Oakley, 2001). Some are addressing scalar relations and looking at countries based on semblances of power and the ability to invest in elite sport. In Europe there is clearly some difference between 'western' and 'eastern' sport development, and this is correlated with the ability to invest in nascent facilities and prepare elite athletes for international competitions. This is also evident in golf with the countries contributing to Team Europe clearly having a 'western' (and 'northern') bias as opposed to a broader European representation. This again is where the context of national identity may offer interesting insights. To frame the conceptual direction of this paper, Anderson's (1983) descriptor of nations as 'imagined communities' has been used by a range of scholars including those who study sport. Whilst the imagined community of millions has been described as being more real when conceived as a team of eleven named individuals in a football team (Hobsbawm, 1990), it has been suggested that the idea of Europe in a sporting context is best understood through the image of twelve named individuals representing the continent in a biennial golf match (Harris, 2014).

Europe has long been perceived and represented as a distant and far away 'other' for many British football supporters. Followers of English football clubs have long talked of 'getting into Europe' (Williams & Wagg, 1991) and national stereotypes form a central part of sports reporting where research on sport and the European media has shown that the English/British press prioritises and promotes a different sort of relationship between sport and other forms of cultural life than can be found in most other European nations (Blain et al., 1993). Sport is situated within wider social and political discourse where there is evidence of both hostility and pro-European affirmations (Blain et al., 1993; Steen, 2015). Sport is represented in a variety of different ways across the European media where national identities continue to be perceived as important. O'Donnell (1994) referred to a 'mapping of the mythical' to highlight the ways in which national stereotypes are perpetuated within sports media discourse. Yet, there has been little work that has looked at European integration through sport and the ways in which a number of European nations can come together. Of all sporting events in the world, it could be argued that the Ryder Cup is the prime site to do this.

1.2. Europe and the Ryder Cup

Whilst there are European teams that compete against the USA in activities such as bowling and pool, the Ryder Cup is the one that attracts the largest amount of media coverage. The Ryder Cup first took place in 1927 as a match between Great Britain and the United States of America. The trophy is named after the seed merchant Samuel Ryder who made his fortune by selling packets of seeds for a penny through the post (see Concannon, 2004). Honours were shared in the first four matches with each side winning the cup twice. However, Great Britain and Northern Ireland (later to become Great Britain and Ireland) would only win the cup on one more occasion as the USA exerted a tight grip on the trophy and dominated the competition for the next fifty years. Ireland was officially added in 1973 although golfers from the Republic of Ireland such as Christy O'Connor

(Snr) had represented the team many years before. During the 1960s and 1970s such was the USA's dominance of the competition that some felt that the Ryder Cup would cease to exist as it was no longer perceived to be a fair competition (see Concannon, 2004; Stafford, 2006). Stafford (2006, p. 18) describes the decision in 1979 to expand the Great Britain & Ireland team to include players from elsewhere in Europe as something that 'saved a festival of golf that was in grave danger of petering out'.

Yet even after the change in 1979, the event received very little media coverage and was not considered to be all that important by many in the sport itself (Concannon, 2004; Stafford, 2006). It attracted scant attention in the broader arena of international sporting events and at a time when increased media coverage and accelerated commercialisation served to reposition sport as a business. The Ryder Cup slowly emerged as an event that had some popular and commercial appeal. Since this change, Europe has won the trophy on ten occasions and have only lost three times since 1995 (see Table 1). The event has also become viewed as something that is increasingly important for some nations to better position themselves within the increasingly competitive golf tourism market (see Hudson & Hudson, 2010).

The majority of victories for Team Europe have occurred on European soil. Team Europe has been successful in matches staged in England, Spain, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and France. The last five of these have each only hosted a European Ryder Cup team once, so to date there is no country in European golf staging the event that has not hosted a winning team. Were this pattern to continue then it bodes well for the European team and for first time host Italy in 2023. Team Europe's success in matches staged in the USA does not match the record in Europe and does perhaps evidence the role of home advantage as an important factor in sport (Carron et al., 2005).

There has been very little research on the Ryder Cup, especially when compared to the growing body of work on other major international sporting events by sport management scholars. Work looking at the place of the Ryder Cup in relation to participation in golf (Morrow & Wheatley, 2003), the link between sponsorship and brand image in the event (Deane et al., 2003), and some of the psychological factors important to team

Table 1. Ryder Cup overview 1979–2016.

Year	Winner	USA	Europe	Host
1979	USA	17	11	USA
1981	USA	18.5	9.5	England
1983	USA	14.5	13.5	USA
1985	Europe	11.5	16.5	England
1987	Europe	13	15	USA
1989	Tie	14	14	England
1991	USA	14.5	13.5	USA
1993	USA	15	13	England
1995	Europe	13.5	14.5	USA
1997	Europe	13.5	14.5	Spain
1999	USA	14.5	13.5	USA
2002	Europe	12.5	15.5	England
2004	Europe	9.5	18.5	USA
2006	Europe	9.5	18.5	Ireland
2008	USA	16.5	11.5	USA
2010	Europe	13.5	14.5	Wales
2012	Europe	13.5	14.5	USA
2014	Europe	11.5	16.5	Scotland
2016	USA	17	11	USA

golf (Jones & Lavalley, 2010) are important to note here. Research has looked at the representation of Team USA within the media (Colley & Harris, 2019; Harris et al., 2017; Harris & Lyberger, 2008) but little work has considered the representation of Team Europe. Steen (2015) analysed the ways in which Europe is (re)presented and critically assessed the different ways in which the British press describe the Ryder Cup. Here there is evidence of a 'continental collectivity' within British media reporting of the event. This is important for it highlights the ways in which a particular sport can offer an alternative to the often xenophobic and nationalistic reporting of other sports in a European context such as football (see O'Donnell, 1994; Williams & Wagg, 1991).

One of the only studies to consider the composition of as Ryder Cup team is the work of sports historians Vamplew and Kay (2007) who looked at the processes and problems of team selection from 1927 to 2006. This work provides an interesting historical account of the changes to team selection procedures and highlights some of the challenges involved in developing successful teams. Vamplew and Kay's (2007) work notes that some players believe that they are representing the European golf tour, rather than Europe per se, and that it is generally perceived that the European team have been more integrated than their American counterparts. The number of captain's picks for Ryder Cup teams has changed on various occasions over the years. Although we do not include this topic within the analysis it is a subject that we will return to later in the paper.

2. Methods: procedure for organising and analysing performance data by nation

Much research has assessed performance in team sports (see Lago-Ballesteros & Lago-Peñas, 2010; Lorains et al., 2013; Passos et al., 2016). There has also been a number of studies focusing on team performance in the sport management literature (e.g. Gomez-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Tavana et al., 2013). This study considers the make-up of European teams and the performances of players from different countries in this event from 1979 to 2016. It is important to note here that we use information from various texts and official sites on the Ryder Cup to identify the different countries that each player is deemed to represent. Golfers from twelve different countries have represented Team Europe during this period. An analysis of performance results variables (focusing on points per country and number of representatives by country) was undertaken to assess mean values of points by country. It was found Europe is most successful when more countries are represented, and this paper breaks down the evidence based on points performance to show what combination of countries will most likely result in a Team Europe Ryder Cup victory. This paper used a variety of descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing including two-sample t-test, and multiple regression analysis. Although not forming part of the data set for this paper, we also look at the result of the most recent Ryder Cup matches in 2018 and 2020 (2021) to see how the outcome of that compares to the key findings to emerge in this work.

The first time that a team representing Europe took part in the event was in 1979 when the team included two golfers from Spain. The first point of analysis was to consider how many representatives per nation and the total number of countries that made up Team Europe. The descriptive analysis in the following section identifies total representation by nation and addresses details on players involved in wins/losses and the nations

represented during wins. Next, we considered total points earned by country in each Ryder Cup to identify the leaders in terms of points per country, and then this was collated with points per country and representation by country. Dividing performance (points) by country representation provided an average performance figure to show how many points on average each representative is contributing to the total. For instance, England clearly leads in terms of number of times represented, but when you look at average points per representative, their performance does not always show the highest performance figures. This is followed by performance rankings based on overall performance by country and representation by country building the best Ryder Cup team based on overall performance. Performance rank is based on total average divided by appearances to get average performance. Note, when a country is listed at the bottom (9, 8, 7, 6, 5 and 4 nations), they cannot have more than the most players put forward in a previous Ryder Cup. The analysis is also carried out based on winning years only, and on performances at home (events staged in Europe) versus performances at Ryder Cup matches in the USA.

Points won by individual players are collated by country to conduct the analysis in the subsequent sections. The Ryder Cup comprises of singles matches on the final day and a combination of fourballs and foursomes on the two days prior to that. The most points that any one individual player could contribute to in a single Ryder Cup event is five. Data on all of the matches played was collected from the Ryder Cup's official website, and the identified nationality of players was checked through consulting various publications on the event.

3. Results

It was found that the extension of the Great Britain & Ireland team into a European team in 1979 did not lead to an immediate change in fortunes (detailed in [Table 1](#)). It took some time for the event to evolve and to become noticeably more European through the gradual integration of golfers from a broader number of countries and a more recent pattern of hosting the European matches outside of England. The expansion of the European team to include players from 8 countries in 1995, and regular success was achieved with over 6 different nationalities representing Team Europe to the present time, with Europe only losing to the USA on three occasions since 1995. The following sections are divided into two points of analysis (based on individual player productivity and collective national performances) and a section on how to win the Ryder Cup building on the collective national performance data.

3.1. Individual player productivity

Team Europe included eighty-one different representatives from twelve countries during the period from 1979 to 2016 ([Table 2](#)). The first iteration of a European team in 1979 included just two players from outside of Britain and Ireland and only featured golfers from four countries (England, Ireland, Scotland, and Spain). Five different countries were represented at the next event (the same four from 1979 plus one player from Germany). It was not until 1993 that we began to see a widening of the composition of

Table 2. Individual Ryder Cup participants by country from 1979 to 2016.

Country	Number of players	%
England	27	33.3
Scotland	8	9.9
Ireland	6	7.4
Wales	3	3.7
France	3	3.7
Sweden	9	11.1
Spain	11	13.6
Denmark	2	2.5
Northern Ireland	5	6.2
Germany	2	2.5
Italy	3	3.7
Belgium	2	2.5
Total	81	100

different nationalities to Team Europe with golfers from Sweden and Italy contributing to a Ryder Cup team for the first time.

The points that an individual golfer earned from all matches he participated in represent a player's contribution to the European total. In terms of average earning points, Germany has the highest points (15.25) followed by Spain (8.18), Wales (6.83), Northern Ireland (6.8), Scotland (6.75), and England (5.01), respectively (see [Table 3](#)). The analysis shows that the player's contribution to Team Europe by country can be assessed through productivity ([Table 4](#)). Of all the countries we can see that of the eighty-one players to have represented Europe there are twelve who have contributed more than eleven points. Productivity is drawn from points earned divided by number of participants. Of all the countries to have made a contribution to European Ryder Cup teams, Belgium shows the highest productivity (2.5) followed by Wales (2.02), Germany (2.01), Northern Ireland (1.96), Spain (1.86), and England (1.60), respectively.

Analysing the data presented in this subsection further to examine whether nationality affects the performance in the Ryder Cup event, we made two groups, English players and other European players given the fact that English representation is one-third of Team Europe's total. The main reason we used two groups was that the lack of number of golfers per country does not allow us to apply appropriate analysis methods. In other words, most countries except England did not have enough players to draw meaningful

Table 3. Average earning points by country based on individual performance.

Country	Number of players (%)	Average points	Standard deviation of points
England	27 (33.3)	5.01	6.24
Scotland	8 (9.9)	6.75	7.52
Ireland	6 (7.4)	3.33	3.76
Wales	3 (3.7)	6.83	8.43
France	3 (3.7)	1.17	1.26
Sweden	9 (11.1)	2.55	2.77
Spain	11 (13.6)	8.18	9.01
Denmark	2 (2.5)	2.25	2.47
Northern Ireland	5 (6.2)	6.8	5.15
Germany	2 (2.5)	15.25	12.37
Italy	3 (3.7)	2.67	2.89
Belgium	2 (2.5)	2.5	2.12
Total	81 (100)	5.29	6.43

Table 4. Player productivity by country.

Country	Productivity
England	1.60
Scotland	1.36
Ireland	1.18
Wales	2.02
France	1.17
Sweden	1.06
Spain	1.86
Denmark	0.92
Northern Ireland	1.96
Germany	2.01
Italy	1.17
Belgium	2.5
Mean value	1.54

statistical results. The null hypothesis is that the total points mean scores of English players and other European players are the same. We used a significant level of 0.05, which means that we allow a maximum chance of 5% of mistakenly rejecting a true null hypothesis. To check if the dependent variable (points earned) is normally distributed between the two groups (i.e. normality assumption), we used the Shapiro–Wilk test (Table 5). Table 5 shows that the p -values of both English players (0.00002) and European players (0.00000) samples are less than 0.05, indicating that the normality assumption is disrupted.

Next, to check the equality of the variance assumption, we used Levene’s test. In Table 6, we can see that the p -values of W0, W50, and W10 are higher than 0.05 and thus, not significant. This means that there is no reason to think that the variances for the points earned by English players and the points earned by other European players are different. After checking the normality assumption and the equality of variance assumption, we found that the data are not normally distributed, but that the variances across the two groups are equal, allowing us to employ a parametric test for group differences (Mooi et al., 2018). Thus, we used an independent samples t -test. Table 7 presents the result of the independent samples t -test and we can conclude that the earning points between English players and other European players are not significantly different ($p = 0.7901$). The result of regression analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between the number of participants and points that the players earned (coefficient = 2.48, $p = 0.000$, R-squared = 0.89). In addition, we divided the whole players into two groups – English players and non-English players – to compare in terms of contributions to points earned. The result confirms that there is no difference between the two groups ($p = 0.702$). To examine any differences among countries, we added dummy variables in a regression model. The results of the model confirm that there is no statistically significant relationship between players’ nationality and their performance.

Table 5. Result of Shapiro–Wilk normality test.

Group	Variable	Obs.	W	V	z	Prob > z
English players	Points earned	27	0.75235	7.281	4.078	0.00002
Non-English players	Points earned	54	0.74696	12.647	5.436	0.00000

Table 6. Result of Levene's Test.

Group	Summary of points		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Frequency
English players	5.0185185	6.2441996	27
Non-English players	5.4259259	6.5792752	54
Total	5.2901235	6.4332458	81
W0 = 0.02380199 df (1, 79) Pr > F = 0.87778325			
W50 = 0.08358860 df (1, 79) Pr > F = 0.77324925			
W10 = 0.07136379 df (1, 79) Pr > F = 0.79005749			

3.2. Representing Team Europe based on collective national performances

Building from the individual player insight outlined above, when we look at national representation at each Ryder Cup and the total number of appearances, golfers from England represent by far the largest overall proportion of European Ryder Cup players with 69 appearances between 1979 and 2016 (Table 8). This is much higher than the total of the next two countries in terms of appearance which are Spain (38) and Scotland (35). These are the only other countries to have golfers with a collective total of more than twenty appearances. Each of the above encompasses a broad selection of golfers but there are cases where an individual golfer such as Ian Woosnam (Wales) or Bernhard Langer (Germany) account for a significant percentage of the overall appearances of a particular country in the event (Woosnam has made eight of the ten appearances for Welsh golfers and Langer accounts for ten of the fourteen German appearances).

When we direct attention to the data displayed in [Table 9](#), this shows the performance by country based on the number of combined points divided by representation to give an average score. There are differences when compared with individual performances displayed in [Table 3](#). Belgium stands out as an anomaly given they had two appearances and the individual had a particularly strong result in 2016, but we can observe that based on collective figures for each nation, Spain, Northern Ireland and Germany show strong averages divided by the total number of appearances.

In geographical terms the Ryder Cup has always been based on the established British and Irish core. This is not surprising given that it was originally a team made up of players from those places. The four nations that make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England) and the Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland) still typically account for close to two-thirds of any European team with one-third of the players coming from elsewhere in Europe. In almost forty years these players have come from just seven other countries. The early matches for

Table 7. Result of the independent sample t-test.

Group	Obs.	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% Conf. Interval	
English players	27	5.018519	1.201697	6.2442	2.548395	7.488642
Non-English players	54	5.425926	.895326	6.579275	3.630129	7.221722
Combined	81	5.290123	.7148051	6.433246	3.867616	6.712631
Diff		.4074074	1.525209		-2.628445	3.44326

Diff = mean (European players) – mean (English players) $t = 0.2671$
Ho = diff = 0 degrees of freedom = 79
Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff! = 0 Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.6050 Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.7901 Pr(T > t) = 0.3950

Table 8. Number of representatives per country in Ryder Cup competition 1979–2016.

Year	Eng	Sco	Sp	Ire	Ger	Wal	Nl	Swe	It	Den	Fr	Bel	Nations
1979	5	4	2	1									4
1981	4	3	2	2	1								5
1983	4	4	2		1	1							5
1985 (win)	3	3	4		1	1							5
1987	2	4	3	1	1	1							6
1989 (tie)	3	2	3	1	1	1	1						7
1991	5	2	2		1	1	1						6
1993	4	2	2		1	1		1	1				7
1995 (win)	4	2	1	1	1	1		1	1				8
1997 (win)	2	1	2		1	1	1	2	1	1			9
1999	1	3	3	1			1	2			1		7
2002 (win)	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3		1			9
2004 (win)	5	1	2	2			1				1		6
2006 (win)	4	1	2	2			1	2					6
2008	5		2	1			1	2		1			6
2010 (win)	4		1	1	1		2	1	2				7
2012 (win)	4	1	1		1		2	1	1			1	8
2014 (win)	3	1	1		1	1	2	1		1	1		9
2016	6		2		1		1	1				1	6
Total	69	35	38	15	14	10	15	17	6	4	3	2	=228
Total/228	0.3	0.15	0.17	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01	=1.00
(*100) for %	30.3	15.4	16.7	6.58	6.14	4.39	6.58	7.46	2.63	1.75	1.32	0.88	=100
RC Appearances	19	16	19	11	14	10	12	11	5	4	3	2	
Most players	6	4	4	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	1	
Most players (wins)	5	3	4	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	1	
Appearances (wins)	30	11	15	8	7	5	10	11	5	3	2	1	
Appearances (loss)	39	24	23	7	7	5	5	6	1	1	1	1	

Table 9. Performance (points) by country based on average of points divided by representation.

Year	Eng	Sco	Sp	Ire	Ger	Wal	Nl	Swe	It	Den	Fr	Bel
1979	1.40	2.38	1	0								
1981	1.13	1.33	1.5	1	1.5							
1983	2.13	1	2.25		4	0.5						
1985	1.66	1.5	2.75		3	2						
1987	2.25	1.25	3.66	1	3.5	3.5						
1989	2.5	1	3	1	0	2.5	1					
1991	1.5	1	4		1.5	1	1.5					
1993	1.5	2	2		2	4.5		1	1			
1995	1.75	2.5	1	1	2	1.5		1	3			
1997	2	3.5	2		3	1	1	2	3	1.5		
1999	2	2.33	2.5	1.5			2	1.75			0	
2002	3	4.5	3	1.5	3.5	1	2	0.5		2		
2004	2	3	2.75	3.25			3.5				1	
2006	3.13	2	3.5	0.75			3	1.25				
2008	2		0.75	0.5			2.5	1.75		0.5		
2010	2.63		2	2	2.5		2.25	1	0.75			
2012	2.75	1	2		1		2	0	0.5			1
2014	2.33	0	2.5		2	3	3	3		0.5	2.5	
2016	0.5		2.25		1		3	2				4
Total ave	38.14	30.3	44.4	13.5	30.5	20.5	26.8	15.3	8.25	4.5	3.5	5
Appearances	19	16	19	11	14	10	12	11	5	4	3	2
ave/app score	2.01	1.89	2.34	1.23	2.18	2.05	2.23	1.39	1.65	1.13	1.17	2.50

the European team had little effect upon the competitiveness of the event and there was no change to the status quo with continued US dominance. In 1993 things began to change somewhat and an emerging Europeanisation of the team where golfers from Sweden, Italy, Denmark, France and Belgium began to appear more frequently. England and Spain are the only two countries to have had a player appear in every European Ryder Cup team to date, with more than three English representatives per team being a regular occurrence.

3.3. How to win the Ryder Cup

Referring back to [Table 8](#), the analysis of collective representation by country highlights that the most likely combination for a European victory comes when there are nine different countries represented as part of Team Europe. There have been three victories when the team has been comprised of nine different nationalities and two victories when the team has been made-up of eight different nationalities. To date, Team Europe has not lost a match where there have been eight or nine different nationalities represented on the team. The lowest number of countries to have made-up a European team is four (in 1979) and Europe has also lost two of the three matches it has played with five different nationalities making up the team. The analysis shows that Europe is least likely to be successful when there are fewer nationalities in the team and when the match is played in the USA. Looking at [Table 10](#), the overall performance rank is based on overall performance by country and representation by country building the best Ryder Cup team based on overall performance. Performance rank is based on each country's collective total average then divided by appearances to get average performance. The results show various scenarios, showing the best group of countries to consider based on overall performance if Team Europe were to comprise of 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 or 4 nations going forward. Note that this is only based on data from previous Ryder Cup's and actual representation will comprise different and new individuals from different countries, but when we look at developing the best team across different European nationalities, previous evidence shows that the more nationalities represented, the better they seem to play as a collective opposed to groupings comprising players from fewer countries.

To calculate the best Team Europe combination, the result of the total average divided by the number of appearances gives us a score (ave/app score in [Table 10](#)). Then a performance rank from 1–12 is determined based on this score. What is also important to recognise in [Table 10](#) is the approach in terms of how representation is determined. When a country is listed at the bottom (9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4), they cannot have more than the most players put forward in a previous Ryder Cup. This is presented in this way because it is based on previous results, therefore while Belgium has a high-performance score, they cannot have more than one representative because no team has had more than one Belgian representing Team Europe. This is why we see at the bottom of [Table 10](#), England and Spain by default see the number of representations increase because they have previously competed with up to six and four players, respectively. So, whilst Italy for example is ranked 9/12, they just make the 9-member team but are the first to go when considering the 8-member team. Based on the overall performance we see that Ireland, Sweden and Denmark are not considered,

Table 10. Calculating how many members from each nation to include on Team Europe (note: Total ave; Appearances; and ave/app are carried over from Table 9).

	Eng	Sco	Sp	Ire	Ger	Wal	Nl	Swe	It	Den	Fr	Bel
Total ave	38.14	30.3	44.4	13.5	30.5	20.5	26.8	15.3	8.25	4.5	3.5	5
Appearances	19	16	19	11	14	10	12	11	5	4	3	2
ave/app scope	2.01	1.89	2.34	1.23	2.18	2.05	2.23	1.39	1.65	1.13	1.17	2.50
Performance rank	6	7	2	11	4	5	3	10	9	12	8	1
Most Players	6	4	4	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	1
Most players (win)	5	3	4	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	1
	Eng	Sco	Sp	Ire	Ger	Wal	Nl	Swe	It	Den	Fr	Bel
9 nations	2	1	2		1	1	2		1		1	1
8 nations	2	2	2		1	1	2				1	1
7 nations	2	2	3		1	1	2					1
6 nations	3		4		1	1	2					1
5 nations	4		4		1		2					1
4 nations	5		4				2					1

based on collective figures, and offers a different perspective when compared to the individual results calculated in [Tables 3](#) and [4](#). Looking at those same figures from [Tables 3](#) and [4](#), France has a weaker result individually, but collectively based on performance can make the 9 and 8 team line-ups.

4. Discussion

A strong team requires leadership. The role of a captain for a Ryder Cup team is typically an honour bestowed on someone as a recognition for the part they had played as a player in previous Ryder Cups. The late Steve Ballesteros is often referred to as one of the most important figures in the success of the Ryder Cup and the decision to award the 1997 Ryder Cup to Spain was a gesture of thanks to Ballesteros for his role in making the Ryder Cup important again. Up until this time no individual from outside of Britain and Ireland had captained a European team although since the tenure of Ballesteros in 1997 the team has also been led by another Spaniard (José María Olazábal), a German (Bernhard Langer) and most recently a Dane (Thomas Bjorn). This reflects both the increased Europeanisation of the Ryder Cup and the wider emergence of top-quality golfers from many different parts of Europe in the last forty years. With a wider geographical spread of countries being chosen to host the competition also emerging, then the event itself becomes more European. Yet in macro terms this still evidences a rather narrow representation of Europe for many European countries have not been represented to date. Many of the successful European Ryder Cup captains have brought in former teammates from their own Ryder Cup playing days to be vice-captains. There have been very different approaches to this role although ultimately the captain is judged on whether or not his team is successful. Going forward, the prevailing wisdom that Team Europe should not be able to compete against Team USA in the Ryder Cup is based upon the perceived challenges of integrating players from so many different countries into a cohesive team. From a minimum of four, to a maximum of nine, different countries represented in any European Ryder Cup team we have highlighted the composition of teams representing Europe to date. In positioning this within the wider context of the continent of Europe it is based upon a very narrow geographical core.

The 2018 Ryder Cup took place in France for the first time and represented an important moment in the continued development of the competition as a European event. In another first, Team Europe was led by a Danish captain. He was the eighth different nationality, and the first from Scandinavia, to captain Team Europe who triumphed by 17 ½ to 10 ½ points. This team was made up of six different nationalities with England once again having the largest representation with five players in the team. Apart from one other player from Northern Ireland, the rest of the team all came from outside of Britain and Ireland with two players from Spain, two from Sweden and one each from Italy and Denmark. The outcome of the 2018 match confirms the results presented in the analysis of data from 1979 to 2016 whereby a Ryder Cup staged in Europe where the home team comprises of more than five different nationalities is likely to result in victory for Team Europe. The 2020 Ryder Cup (finally staged in 2021 after being postponed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic) resulted in a record victory for Team USA. This defeated European team comprised of golfers from six different nations and

due to the continued restrictions on international travel they played the match in front of the most partisan and one-sided crowd in the history of the Ryder Cup. This convincing victory for Team USA also once again highlighted the importance of home advantage in the event. The next Ryder Cup to be staged on European soil will also take place in continental Europe with Italy confirmed as the hosts for the 44th Ryder Cup.

One of the things often overlooked when celebrating the success of a European team in relation to wider discussions of European identity is that Team Europe emerged out of pragmatism and was not developed as part of a conscious attempt to promote a European identity through sport. The reality was that the match was becoming too one-sided and questions were asked whether the event should be allowed to continue. There were various other options considered when expanding the team in the late 1970s and at the time many felt that it would best be developed by forming a team of golfers from the Commonwealth. Yet it was a European team that was established in time for the 1979 match and this slowly rekindled interest in the event. As the team became more and more successful, it attracted greater attention and was appropriated for political purposes. Some were keen to show how the team was a symbol of wider European integration. Yet as stated previously, for some players representing Europe in the Ryder Cup was about their affiliation and commitment to the European golf tour and not this wider continent (Europe) or a postnational collective (the European Union).

It is also important here to acknowledge other important factors beyond the data used in this study. In trying to explain European success in the Ryder Cup some US media attributed this to the decline of the collegiate golf system in the USA (see Harris, 2012). Yet this failed to recognise the fact that many of the top European performers across the period studied in this research were themselves products of this system. Colin Montgomerie, for many years the most prominent Scottish golfer in the Ryder Cup, was a student at Houston Baptist University. Other successful European players like Englishmen Luke Donald (Northwestern University) and Paul Casey (Arizona State University) have also attended university in the USA. Jon Rahm from Spain also graduated from Arizona State University and was part of the victorious European team in 2018. European success in the Ryder Cup then could in some ways be attributed to the American collegiate golf system as a number of countries are now represented in some of the top college golf programmes. Some of these players may be part of European Ryder Cup teams in the future.

The increased globalisation of sport and the migration of athletes between places is also worth noting here for whilst they were born in England some golfers on European Ryder Cup teams have lived in the USA for many years. It should also be noted that other successful golfers identified with a particular country who are part of the data set presented here (e.g. Ian Woosnam, Wales) were in fact born outside of the country that they represent. The majority of these were born in a neighbouring country (e.g. Ian Woosnam, Wales and Sandy Lyle, Scotland were both born in England) although there are others such as the English golfer Justin Rose who was born in South Africa. Rose represented Team GB at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games where he won a gold medal as the sport returned to the Olympic programme.

Further research could also look at the significance of the Captain's picks for the European team and whether there is scope for including performance data on nationality as a factor in future team selections. The topic of Captain's picks is constantly evolving and the criteria has changed on a number of occasions (see Vamplew & Kay, 2007). There have

been examples of teams within teams and successful pairings of playing partners from the same country (e.g. Ballesteros and Olazábal from Spain) that has been noted by many commentators. Yet many of the most successful partnerships have been of players from different countries (e.g. Langer from Germany and Montgomerie from Scotland, or Clarke from Northern Ireland and Westwood from England). In the 2018 event staged in France, the Italian golfer Francesco Molinari teamed up with Ryder Cup rookie Tommy Fleetwood from England to win four matches. Molinari also won his singles match to become the first ever player from Team Europe to secure five points for the team. Whilst national pairings have contributed to the success of Team Europe, there are many other reasons for the successes and failings of different playing combinations. If success in the biennial golf match was based solely on national affiliation, then the USA would win every time.

To further explore the importance of representing Team Europe, future research could draw upon the autobiographies of Ryder Cup players to gain an insight into what the event means to them. To extend and develop an analysis of media coverage of the event in a number of different countries across Europe would also be an interesting area of research into broader European identities. There is also much to learn about the importance of the Ryder Cup in relation to national identities within the USA.

5. Conclusion

This work has contributed to the literature on European sport and identified some of the important factors to consider when looking at the success of European teams in golf. It has shown that whilst national identities are still clearly very important in top-level sport, there is room for supranational identities and wider collectives to flourish. Despite Brexit, the Ryder Cup will remain one of the most potent and enduring symbols of European identity in sport and an important site for the United Kingdom to remain a part of Europe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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